

Nora Greene

JrCOSTEP – Summer 2005

Illinois State University

Keams Canyon Service Unit, Arizona – Phoenix Area IHS

I first learned about the Environmental Health COSTEP program when a representative from the Indian Health Service (IHS) came and spoke to my class about the opportunity. Fellow Environmental Health majors told me about their positive experiences with IHS and encouraged me to apply. I took their advice and applied with the intention of accepting any duty station that was located in the Southwest. I have lived in the Midwest all of my life and I wanted to experience a change in scenery for the summer. I was accepted into the COSTEP program and was assigned to the Keams Canyon Service Unit in rural Northern Arizona. I had never lived in a rural community before, so I did not know what to expect.



When I arrived at the Keams Canyon Service Unit I entered the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering (OEH&E) and met Jull Shugart, Environmental Health Officer (EHO) I would be working for and she gave me a tour of the Hopi Reservation. The OEH&E department is in charge of all of the Hopi Tribe along with the Kaibab Paiute Tribe of Indians who are located about 200 miles away from the Hopi Reservation on the Arizona/Utah border. Right away the EHO made me feel welcome and encouraged me to take advantage of everything the Hopi Reservation had to offer.

My average workday was split between time in the field and time in the office. My COSTEP was unique in that I was also able to do a variety of environmental health activities. I investigated animal bites to ensure that the animal in question did not transmit rabies to the patient, investigated complaints from community members related to environmental health, set up mosquito traps to test for West Nile Virus, attended monthly environmental health related meetings at the hospital, conducted food surveys, assisted in conducting a survey of the Hopi Jail, attended a Safe Native American Passengers presentation, participated in two rabies clinics, and assisted in conducting food handlers training. I also worked on two main projects over the summer. The first consisted of entering injury data forms into an Epi 6 Database for all injuries occurring on the Hopi Reservation for the years 1995-2002. The second project involved testing for larvae in various water sources on the reservation and then distributing larvicide to the water sources in need. The goal of this project was to reduce the risk of West Nile Virus on the reservation by reducing the number of mosquito larvae. Working with the Hopi Tribe allowed me to practice the skills I had learned in my Environmental Health Classes. The Hopi Tribe is very traditional so I learned how to be sensitive to other people's

beliefs and lifestyles while trying to get my point across. Every day was different which made things interesting and gave me experience in many different areas.

While I was not at work I took advantage of the beautiful terrain and went bike riding and jogging around the mesas. The land was beautiful and great for outdoor activities. I was also able to attend some of the Hopi Home Dances over the summer, this allowed me to experience their culture and understand more about their beliefs. I would recommend a COSTEP to any student. I would also recommend that anyone who is adventurous and loves the outdoors to apply to work on the Hopi Reservation. It truly was a great experience for me.